

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH MAJOR GENERAL JAMES SIMMONS,  
DEPUTY COMMANDING GENERAL SUPPORT, MULTI- NATIONAL CORPS-IRAQ SUBJECT: OPERATION  
PHANTOM STRIKE VIA TELECONFERENCE FROM IRAQ TIME: 10:30 A.M. EDT DATE: MONDAY,  
AUGUST 27, 2007

-----  
Copyright (c) 2007 by Federal News Service, Inc., Ste. 500 1000 Vermont Avenue,  
NW, Washington, DC 20005, USA. Federal News Service is a private firm not  
affiliated with the federal government. No portion of this transcript may be  
copied, sold or retransmitted without the written authority of Federal News  
Service, Inc. Copyright is not claimed as to any part of the original work  
prepared by a United States government officer or employee as a part of that  
person's official duties. For information on subscribing to the FNS Internet  
Service, please visit <http://www.fednews.com> or call (202)347-1400  
-----

(Note: Please refer to [www.defendamerica.mil](http://www.defendamerica.mil) for more information.)

CHARLES "JACK" HOLT (chief, New Media Operations, OASD PA): Thank you,  
Major General James E. Simmons, United States Army Deputy Commanding General for  
Support, Multi-national Corps, Iraq with us on the Blogger's Roundtable this  
morning.

General Simmons, welcome. And do you have an opening statement for us,  
sir?

GEN. SIMMONS: Yeah. I would very briefly like to go over a couple of  
things. First, I'd like to describe what my job title is in case that would  
help frame your questions. Are you still there? MR. HOLT: Yes sir. Yes sir,  
we are.

GEN. SIMMONS: Major General James Simmons. I'm the deputy commanding  
general for support. I am responsible for the day-to-day supervision of the 17  
separate brigades and commands that support Multi-National Corps Iraq. That's  
about 35,000 soldiers that are operating all over Iraq, and they provide combat  
support and combat service support activities for the Corps.

I'm responsible for the coordination of Title X support, oversight of  
operational force protection -- that includes the IED fight with Task Force Troy  
and JCCS-I. I provide oversight to the Corps' portion of detainee operations in  
coordination with Task Force 134. I'm also responsible for the oversight of  
logistics and aviation operations.

And with that as a backdrop, I'd like to make the following opening  
statement.

On the 15th of August, Multi-National Corps Iraq launched Operation  
Phantom Strike, which is a series of targeted operations designed to intensify  
the pursuit of extremist elements across Iraq. Our idea here is to continue to  
pursue the al-Qaeda and Shi'a extremists that we have moved out of their safe  
havens and support zones while conducting Operation Phantom Thunder. It is the  
intent of the commanding general to continue this pursuit and to continue to  
disrupt their capability to mount significant operations.

Over the coming weeks, we will continue to conduct quick strike raids  
against the remaining extremist sanctuaries and staging areas, carry out

precision targeting operations against extremist leadership and focus missions to counter the extremists' lethal accelerants of choice -- that's the IED and the vehicle-borne IED. We will continue to hunt down their leadership, deny them safe haven, disrupt supply lines and significantly reduce their capability to operate here in Iraq.

This operation, which involved 16,000 Iraqi and coalition forces clearing approximately 50 villages, was a key element in the Multinational Corps-Iraq's overall Operation Phantom Strike. It resulted in 26 al Qaeda members killed, 37 terrorists detained and the discovery of 10 large weapons caches. This operation has helped set the stage for further economic development in Diyala, as evidenced recently by the opening of a flour mill in Baqubah and 49 billion Iraqi dinar being given to the provincial government for stabilization efforts and their ability to stimulate economic development.

Our enemy that we face here is ruthless and will no doubt attempt to exploit the upcoming Ramadan season as well as influence political opinions in the coming weeks by increasing attacks, with particular emphasis on high-profile terror attacks. However, al Qaeda and other extremist elements will have to contend with an Iraqi population that no longer welcomes them as well as quick-hitting offensive operations conducted by coalition and Iraqi forces.

We've experienced an encouraging trend of increased security over the last six months. Continued aggressive offensive operations that seek out and destroy these extremist networks will prove to be the most effective way to continue to protect the citizens of Iraq and set the security conditions so that local, provincial and central government activities can continue to develop.

Security across Iraq is generally improving. Iraqis are feeling that, and they sense that the tide is turning. They are rejecting extremists from their communities. They are providing intelligence to Iraqi and coalition security forces. They are volunteering to provide security in their own neighborhoods and to join the legitimate Iraqi security force. This would not have been achieved without the increased coalition force presence that the surge has brought us.

We will continue on occasion to face some setbacks here in Iraq, but overall we continue to make steady progress.

Al Qaeda has been forced to undertake its spectacular event in more remote parts of the country that are undefended rather than in the capital and in the larger cities. And we no longer see the cycle of sectarian revenge that plagued Iraq last year.

Despite political challenge, the capacity of the provincial governance and some of the ministries continues to grow, as witnessed by the way that they respond to large-scale terrorist attacks and how they have begun to execute their internal budgets.

There are no easy solutions in Iraq, and it will continue to require strategic, operational and tactical patience for us to enjoy success.

With that as background, I am -- or as my opening statement, I am prepared to entertain and answer your questions.

MR. HOLT: Thank you very much, General Simmons.

And Andrew Lubin -- once again I would like to remind you guys online that when it comes your time for the question, to identify yourself and your publication. So we would appreciate that. Andrew Lubin.

Q General, good afternoon. This is Andrew Lubin from U.S. Cavalry ON Point. We appreciate you taking the time to be with us today.

Sir, there is no doubt that the surge is working on the ground. Between what you're doing in Diyala and the Marines in Anbar, things are going very well in the local and provincial level. But on an Iraqi federal level, it's not. How do we maintain the success -- or how do you maintain the success that you've obviously won when the federal government doesn't really -- does their best to give it back?

GEN. SIMMONS: Well, first of all, I would say that the -- we have to accept the realities of democratic governance and the fact that this government has been in power for a relatively short period of time, and that it takes -- in a democratic form of government, as you well know, it takes debate in order to reach compromise in order to pass legislation. And it takes considerable debate in the United States, where we only have two major political parties. Here in Iraq there are many more than two major political parties, and it requires debate and compromise amongst those parties in order to gain the necessary votes to pass legislation. So part of what we're experiencing here is a nation that is learning how to function under a democratic form of government, something that they had not practiced since the Ba'athists took over about 1962. And so they're -- you know, I like to say they're building the airplane as it's flying as they work their way through it. In some ministries we are seeing, you know, some development, but overall, yes, we are disappointed in the growth and development of the Iraqi political process at the highest levels in the government, and we're hopeful that with the work of our folks over here, they will continue to show some improvement.

Q But General -- Jack, if I could follow-up.

MR. HOLT: Yeah.

Q But General, I'm sorry, but we were talking with Colonel Simcock last week from RCT 6, and he tells us that they still see time and time again where the Iraqi ministers aren't sending the money that they've committed out to Anbar. You've got six months ago the assistant ministry of health, I believe, who was diverting the medical resources out to JAM and taking money on the side. That's not learning democracy, that's working against it and/or getting rich at the same time. That seems from our end what we're hearing time and time again.

(Electronic noise heard on the line.)

GEN. SIMMONS: Are you still there?

Q Yes, sir.

GEN. SIMMONS: Andrew, I think those are all fair comments that you mentioned. And we have and the Iraqi government has taken significant steps to correct the incredible problems that existed in the Ministry of Health. I'm not trying to blow you off or say that your --

Q I understand.

GEN. SIMMONS: -- assessment is wrong. I'm just saying that it's a difficult process that we're trying to work our way through over here. I would say that the description that you just had there in sum is a correct assessment. In other areas there is some improvement.

Q Great. Thank you very much.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Bruce McQuain.

Q General, good afternoon. Bruce McQuain with Q&O.net. There's a story today in the Herald Tribune, International Herald Tribune, about the British moving out of Basra, and a report that the Mahdi Army has essentially moved in. How does that impact your operations in Phantom Strike?

GEN. SIMMONS: Well, first of all, I don't know where they got their information, but it is not accurate. We turned over, in a planned operation, the Basra palace to the Iraqi security forces, an operation that has been scheduled and planned for over nine months. It was done in a deliberate manner. It was coordinated with the Iraqi government and it was supervised by General Mohan, a four-star general who runs the military operations for the Iraqis in Basra, and the British forces that were stationed there.

The British forces have consolidated into one FOB, forward operating base, that is around the airfield there on the northwest side of Basra.

So I don't -- I have absolutely -- (audio break) -- idea of what they're talking about the Mahdi Army taking over Basra. That is just absolutely untrue.

Q Fair enough. And if I could follow up, just on your opening statement, you talked about the operation being a series of targeted ops to pursue AQI and Shi'a militias, to disrupt them. I assume that means outside the belts of Baghdad and Baghdad proper.

GEN. SIMMONS: We are conducting strike operations both inside Baghdad, inside the belts, and outside of Baghdad, in all three areas. And because of the surge -- that we brought in the five additional brigades, the division headquarters and a combat aviation brigade -- we have sufficient forces to hold the areas that we have already secured and conduct focused strike operations with both special operating forces and conventional forces in all three of those areas that I just described.

Q Thanks, General.

MR. HOLT: All right. And Jarred.

Q Yes, sir. Thank you for your time, General. Could you talk to -- we're seeing a lot of tactical success against al Qaeda, and we're seeing a lot of the Sunnis come to our side. And today, speaking to Andrew Lubin's point, the -- you see the Iraqi government actually announcing a new unity front, which is pretty good. Now how are we dealing with the Shi'a side, the rogue JAM members, the Iranian Qods Force, the IRGC infiltrations? Are we going to start seeing successes against them as well? Thank you.

GEN. SIMMONS: Jerry (sic), the first thing I would tell you is that we conduct focused strike operations against rogue JAM every night. We will

continue to intensify those operations against the illegitimate militants that are operating under the title of JAM, wherever they may be here in Iraq.

The higher-visibility stuff has been against al Qaeda, but we continue to conduct those operations against the Shi'a extremists as well. Now, your thought process about, you know, these guys are cooperating with or there is some relationship between them and Iran or the IRGC -- what we see in that area is that as we have surged combat forces here in Iraq, we believe that Iran has surged its support for these rogue elements in Iraq as well, with money, weapons. That includes EFPs, IEDs and other weapons, to include rockets, mortars and RPGs. And we also have some pretty strong indications that they have been involved in the assistance of training some of these activities -- or some of these elements, these rogue elements, probably in Iran itself.

So we are continuing to go after these guys.

We will continue to ramp up our operations against both the Shi'a extremists that are not part of the political process, as well as continuing the attacks against al Qaeda.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir, we've had a couple other folks join us. Who else is online with us?

Q Grim with blackfive.net.

MR. HOLT: All right, Grim, why don't you add -- why don't you go ahead?

Q I was wondering if we could talk about the impact of the recently announced federal-level political reforms. Has -- have you had a chance to look at those that are in the news this morning, General?

GEN. SIMMONS: I have not. I have actually been out and about on the terrain of Baghdad today and have not had a chance to read the newspapers or read any of the analysis of the announced political reform.

Q Well, that's fair. I'll ask again later on when people have had a chance to look at the details.

I'll pass.

MR. HOLT: Okay, all right, and who else is with us online? Anybody -- has everybody had a chance? Have we gone around the table once, or is there somebody left?

Q Well, I've got a follow-up, General, if you got a second for us.

MR. HOLT: Okay.

Q Andrew Lubin again from ON Point.

General, I saw on Milnet, right before we logged on, that the Iraqi government has announced a reversal of the de-Ba'athification rules. Do you know anything about this?

GEN. SIMMONS: No, I do not know anything about that. Q Because that would certainly be excellent news if that's more than a rumor.

GEN. SIMMONS: I'll certainly go check that one out.

Q Great.

Grim, I'll send it to you if you like.

Q That was actually what I was asking about.

Q Okay, fair enough. (Laughs.)

MR. HOLT: All right, well, if there -- any other follow-ups?

(Cross talk.)

All right, General Simmons, thank you very much for being with us this morning and taking time out to be with the Bloggers Roundtable, and hopefully we can speak with you again.

GEN. SIMMONS: I look forward to it. Thank you very much for taking time out of your busy schedules to visit with us.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir, thank you very much, Major General. James E. Simmons, the deputy commanding general for support, Multinational Corps-Iraq, on the Bloggers Roundtable this morning. Thank you, sir.

Q Hey, General, thank you, sir.

GEN. SIMMONS: You're quite welcome.

END.